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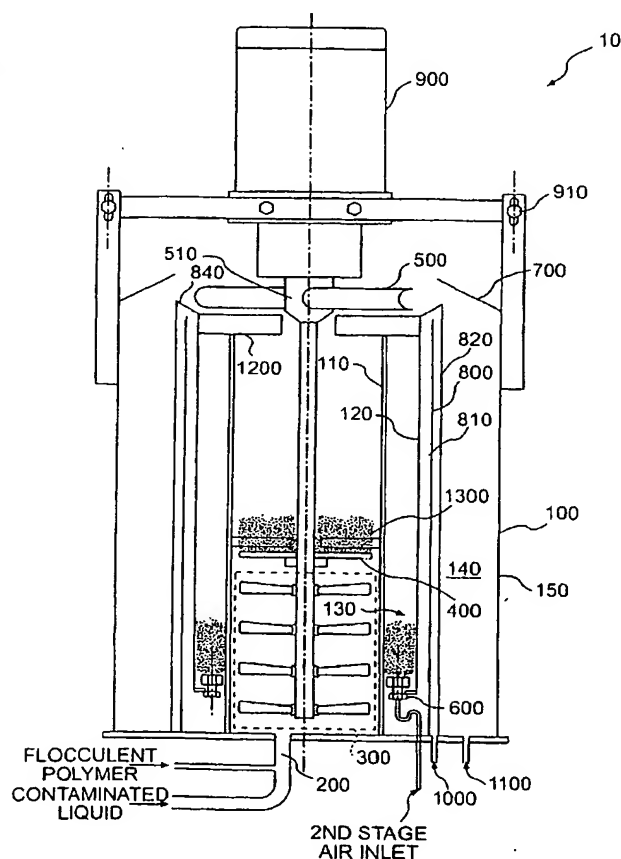
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR THE TREATMENT OF A CONTAMINATED FLUID



(57) Abstract: A process for treating contaminated fluid is disclosed. An apparatus (10) for treatment of contaminated fluid comprises: an integral tank (100); an inlet (200) for introducing a mixture of flocculent polymer and a contaminated fluid; a mixer (300) in the bottom of an innermost cylinder (110) that has first stage aerating means (400); a rotary skimmer (500) above the fluid level of the innermost cylinder and a second stage aeration cylinder (120) that has second stage aerating means (600) surrounding the innermost cylinder; a de-aeration baffle (700) on the same plane as the rotary skimmer (500) and extending around an outermost cylinder (150); fluid level control means (800), between the second stage aeration cylinder (120) and the outermost cylinder (150), directing fluid flow from the second stage aeration cylinder (120) out of the tank (100); means (900) for powering the mixer (300) and the rotary skimmer (500); and an outlet (1000), permitting clear fluid to exit the tank (100), and an outlet (1100) permitting waste effluent to exit the tank (140).

WO 03/070645 A1



European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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Published:

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APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR THE TREATMENT OF A CONTAMINATED FLUID

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present invention relates to, and is entitled to the benefit of the earlier filing date and priority of, U.S. Application Serial No. 60/357,658, filed February 20, 2002.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to an apparatus and process for separating contaminants from a fluid, such as wastewater. In particular, the present invention integrates components and processes into a single unit, providing for the formation and removal of a combination of flocculent polymer and contaminants (floc) from a contaminated fluid.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Due to the continuous production of large amounts of wastewater and other contaminated fluids, there is a need to provide effective and economical purification of such fluids. Otherwise, these effluents would be introduced into the environment, potentially leading to undesirable environmental consequences. Accordingly, a variety of treatment systems have been developed to purify contaminated fluids.

[0004] Gravity separation and flotation are several of the various approaches used in fluid treatment systems. These conventional systems primarily rely on gravity clarification regions, in which heavy solids settle out of the fluid and are removed from the bottom of the treatment tank. Flotation may additionally be utilized, in which gas bubbles are employed to draw particulate matter to the surface, where it is skimmed off, typically by a scooping mechanism. Specifically, flocculent, which is a polymer used to remove contaminants from water, may be mixed with wastewater, so that it will combine with the contaminants in the fluid. This mixture of flocculent and contaminants creates floc particles, which may be

aerated for flotation and then removed. Prior treatment systems often integrated these conventional components in series, sometimes with pipelines connecting the various regions. Such systems are expensive and require a large footprint.

[0005] For instance, Wang et al., U.S. Pat. No. 5,068,031, is directed to a
5 sludge-treatment apparatus that uses flotation-gravity clarification. In particular, sludge is removed by a gravity clarification process in which heavy sludge, which settles to the bottom of the tank, is collected by a traveling scraper blade. Sludge is also removed by a flotation process in which floated scum from dissolved gas thickening is removed from the fluid surface by a sludge scoop collector.

[0006] U.S. Pat. No. 5,472,611 to von Nordenskjold et al. is directed to an
10 apparatus and process for the purification of wastewater in several successive stages. The purification basin is divided into regions by separating walls and the water travels through each of these regions successively in the direction of current flow. In the first region the water is aerated, and then it is subjected to intermediate
15 clarification using a sedimentation surface. The water finally travels through post-clarification aeration and sedimentation regions. Sludge is deposited and removed from the bottom of each of the sedimentation regions.

[0007] Loy, U.S. Pat. No. 5,639,371, is directed to an apparatus and process
20 for aerating wastewater. The reactor comprises a basin that is divided into two aeration cells, which are connected in series. After the wastewater is sequentially treated in the aeration cells, it passes through an outlet to a clarifier in which solid materials settle out of the liquid.

[0008] Drewery, U.S. Pat. No. 6,106,704, is directed to a wastewater
25 treatment system contained within a cylindrical tank, which has a top capping off its open end. Within the tank, Drewery teaches a clarifier compartment and an aeration compartment surrounding the clarifier compartment. The aeration compartment may contain two aerators. The apparatus further includes a platform on top of the tank, to which an air pump is affixed having an air line extending into the aeration compartment, and an access opening formed in the top.

[0009] Drewery, U.S. Pat. No. 6,165,359, is directed to a high strength
30 wastewater treatment system. Specifically, this patent teaches a treatment system comprising two tanks connected by a pipeline. The first tank contains a first aerator,

while the second tank contains a clarifier compartment and a second aerator. The pipe allows liquid to pass between the two tanks.

[0010] Each of the prior art references utilizes clarification regions for collecting solid materials that settle out of the liquid. Although flotation may also be utilized, the prior art systems skim off particulate matter having high water contents, typically with a scooping mechanism. A system is needed that includes a novel apparatus and process to remove contaminants from a liquid in an economical manner, without requiring large amounts of space. What is also needed is a wastewater treatment system that can integrate the components for wastewater treatment into a single unit. A system that allows for removal of floc comprised of less water content is also needed.

[0011] It is therefore an advantage of some, but not necessarily all, embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus and process for the treatment of contaminated fluids that integrates multiple components into a single unit for the formation and removal of floc from contaminated fluids. It is another advantage of embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus that alleviates the higher costs and greater footprint requirements of conventional wastewater treatment components. It is a further advantage of embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus that uses a rotary skimmer rather than filtration for floc separation. It is another advantage of embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus with a rotary skimmer and aeration design that allows for removal of floc comprised of a reduced water content than achievable with known systems. It is yet another advantage of embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus with first stage aerating means for improved dispersion of micro-bubbles and reduction of turbulence above a mixing zone. It is still yet another advantage of embodiments of the present invention to provide an apparatus that maximizes the density of accumulated floc in a waste tank, so that the floc may flow out of the tank.

[0012] Additional advantages of various embodiments of the invention are set forth, in part, in the description that follows and, in part, will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from the description and/or from the practice of the invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] Responsive to the foregoing challenges, Applicant has developed an innovative apparatus for the treatment of a contaminated fluid, comprising: an integral tank; with an inlet in the tank for introducing a mixture of flocculent polymer and a contaminated fluid into the tank; a mixer, located in a bottom region of an innermost cylinder in the tank; first stage aerating means, located within the innermost cylinder; a rotary skimmer, located above the fluid level of the innermost cylinder and a second stage aeration cylinder surrounding the innermost cylinder; second stage aerating means, located within the second stage aeration cylinder; a de-aeration baffle, located on the same plane as the rotary skimmer and extending around an outermost cylinder; fluid level control means, located between the second stage aeration cylinder and the outermost cylinder, directing fluid flow from the second stage aeration cylinder out of the tank; means for powering the mixer and the rotary skimmer; a first outlet for permitting clear fluid to exit the tank; and a second outlet for permitting waste effluent to exit the tank.

[0014] Applicant has also developed an innovative method for treating a contaminated fluid, comprising the steps of: introducing a mixture of a flocculent and the contaminated fluid into an innermost cylinder of a tank having a mixer located therein; aerating the mixture as it proceeds upward through the innermost cylinder; skimming the aerated floc formed by the flocculent and the contaminants; aerating the mixture as it proceeds downward through a second cylinder surrounding the innermost cylinder; and directing the fluid flow from the second cylinder out of the tank as a decontaminated fluid. The method may further comprise the steps of: de-aerating the skimmed floc by directing it across the surface of a de-aeration baffle into a waste tank; and accumulating the floc in the waste tank as a higher density fluid until it is released through an outlet in the tank.

[0015] It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only, and are not restrictive of the invention as claimed. The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated herein by reference, and which constitute a part of this specification, illustrate certain embodiments of the invention and, together with the detailed description, serve to explain the principles of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] In order to assist the understanding of this invention, reference will now be made to the appended drawings, in which like reference characters refer to like elements. The drawings are exemplary only, and should not be construed as limiting the invention.

[0017] Figure 1 is an illustration of an apparatus for the treatment of contaminated fluids in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, depicting the integrated tank and its associated components.

[0018] Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of the first stage aerating means of an embodiment of the present invention, depicting the components of the rotary aerator.

[0019] Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view of the second stage aerating means of an embodiment of the present invention, depicting the components of the aeration ring assembly.

[0020] Figure 4 is an illustration of another embodiment of the apparatus for the treatment of contaminated fluids, including a pump and fluid flushing system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0021] Reference will now be made in detail to an embodiment of the present invention, an example of which is illustrated in the accompanying drawings. With reference to Fig. 1, the apparatus for the treatment of contaminated fluids 10 may comprise a single integral tank 100 with an inlet 200 for fluids to enter tank 100 and two outlets 1000, 1100 for fluids to exit tank 100. Within tank 100, the apparatus may include a mixer 300, means for first and second stage aerating 400, 600, a rotary skimmer 500, a de-aeration baffle 700, and fluid level control means 800. The apparatus 10 may further include means for powering 900 skimmer 500 and mixer 300, which may also power first stage aerating means 400.

[0022] Vertical skimmer adjustment 910 may allow for the control of floc wetness during the skimming operation by fixing the distance between the fluid level (controlled by fluid level column cylinder 800) and the height at which skimming takes place.

[0023] Inlet 200 in tank 100 may permit a mixture of flocculent and a contaminated fluid, such as wastewater or other contaminated fluids to enter an innermost cylinder 110 of tank 100. Mixer 300 may be located in the bottom region of cylinder 110 for mixing the flocculent and contaminated fluid and sending the mixture upward through cylinder 110 toward first stage aerating means 400.

[0024] In an embodiment of the present invention, means for first stage aeration 400 may comprise a rotary aerator, as depicted in Fig. 2, which may be located within innermost cylinder 110 of tank 100. Rotary aerator 400 may introduce micro-bubble aeration into a mixture of flocculent polymer and contaminants ("floc") to enhance the flotation of the floc. Rotary aerator 400 may comprise a circular disc 410 having a sintered diffuser material 420 inserted over a plurality of plenum chambers 430. Rotary aerator 400 may disburse micro-bubbles into the mixture of fluids contained within innermost cylinder 110 in the region above rotary aerator 400.

In another embodiment, first stage aerating means 400 may comprise a fixed, non-rotating aerator. First stage aerating means 400, whether comprised of rotary or fixed aeration, may be supplied compressed air or other gas compositions that may enhance performance. Air may be supplied to each plenum region 430 below sintered diffuser material 420 through a passage 440 below each plenum 430.

[0025] In another embodiment, first stage aerating means 400 may comprise a rotary aerator having a cylindrical porous air diffuser. An outer shell may surround a portion of the cylindrical air diffuser and extend radially beyond the diffuser into innermost cylinder 110. The outer shell may scoop the floc mixture as it flows past the aerator, which may assist in the aeration of the mixture.

[0026] Second stage aerating means 600, as depicted in Fig. 3, may comprise a circular air distribution manifold 610 that extends around the bottom region of second stage aeration region 130. This annular aeration region 130 may comprise an inside cylinder 110 and a second stage aeration cylinder 120. Air distribution manifold 610 may comprise an upper and lower ring 611, 612 configured so as to provide compressed air to a plurality of diffuser nozzle assemblies 620 positioned around air distribution manifold 610. In another embodiment 630, air

distribution manifold **640** may comprise a tubular ring **640** to which diffuser nozzles **620** are connected.

[0027] Rotary skimmer **500** may be located within tank **100** and above the fluid level within innermost cylinder **110** and second stage aeration cylinder **120**.

5 Skimmer blades **500** may skive the floc at a level above the fluid. The height of skimmer blades **500** over the fluid may be established by vertical adjustment **910**, which communicates with rotary skimmer **500**. Vertical skimmer adjustment **910** may allow for the control of floc wetness during the skimming operation by fixing the distance between the fluid level (controlled by fluid level column cylinder **800**) and
10 the height at which skimming takes place. If the height of skimmer **500** is adjusted to be low, or close to the fluid level, the floc that is skimmed will be wet. As the height of skimmer **500** increases above the fluid level, the fluid content (wetness) in the skimmed floc decreases.

[0028] The fluid level within second stage aeration cylinder **120** may be
15 controlled by a weir arrangement. In particular, fluid may flow upward through a fluid column plenum **810**, which may be contained between second stage aeration cylinder **120** and a fluid level column cylinder **800**. Setting the height of fluid level column cylinder **800** determines the level of the fluid within second stage aeration cylinder **120** and fluid level column cylinder **800**. Fluid then may flow downward
20 through a column contained between fluid level column cylinder **800** and a fluid containment cylinder **820**, until it flows through first outlet **1000** and exits tank **100** as clear fluid.

[0029] Outermost waste fluid containment cylinder **150** may surround all concentric cylinders contained within: innermost cylinder **110**; second stage
25 aeration cylinder **120**; fluid level control cylinder (weir) **800**; and fluid containment cylinder **820**.

[0030] De-aeration baffle **700**, which may be located on the same plane as rotary skimmer **500**, extends around outermost cylinder **150**. Floc may be de-aerated as it travels across a tank baffle **840**, which is the top of the weir column arrangement, de-aeration baffle **700**, and into waste tank **140**. Outermost cylinder
30 **150** may comprise the outer wall of waste tank **140** into which floc that has been

skimmed and de-aerated is accumulated for release through second outlet **1100** as a fluid.

[0031] Finally, means for powering **900** rotary skimmer **500** and mixer **300** may comprise a single drive motor, or any other suitable device or system. Motor **900** may also power first stage aerating means **400**. If first stage aerating means **400** includes a rotary aerator, then motor **900** may power skimmer **500**, aerator **400**, and mixer **300**. If first stage aerating means **400** is fixed, however, motor **900** will not be necessary to provide power to aerator **400**, and may only be used to power skimmer **500** and mixer **300**.

[0032] In another embodiment of the present invention, as depicted in Fig. 4, the apparatus for treatment of contaminated fluid **10** may include a pump and flushing fluid system **1400**, which may be either located inside or outside tank **100**. System **1400** may be used to pump wet floc of high fluid content from a lower region of outermost cylinder, or waste tank **140**. The floc that is pumped may have high fluid content. This wet floc may act as a flushing fluid to prevent fouling or contaminant accumulation on skimmer blades **500** and surfaces of tank **100**. This flushing fluid may be introduced into rotating head **510** of rotary skimmer **500**. Rotating head **510** may direct the flow of the flushing fluid to the blades of skimmer **500**, thereby flushing the skimmed floc from the blades, over tank baffle **840**, along de-aeration baffle **700**, and into waste tank **140**. This system may help prevent aerated floc from accumulating on the blades of skimmer **500** and provide inertia to the floc so that it is effectively accelerated across de-aeration baffle **700** and into waste tank **140**. Air may be released from the floc as it travels across de-aeration baffle **700** with the fluid, so that the floc may be collected as a higher density fluid. Additionally, the wet floc pumped out of waste tank **140** as the flushing fluid may be further de-aerated, so that it also may become a higher density fluid that exits waste tank **140**.

[0033] Another embodiment of the present invention may include a stationary primary dam **1200**, as shown in Fig. 1, located above the fluid level of innermost cylinder **110** and below rotary skimmer **500**. Primary dam **1200** may prevent floc from rotating with skimmer **500**. This may be helpful when skimmer **500** is rotating

at slower speeds. Primary dam 1200 may be of any size, shape, material, or design.

[0034] Another embodiment of the present invention may also include a secondary stationary dam 1300, as shown in Fig. 1, located above first stage aerating means 400 within innermost cylinder 110. Secondary dam 1300 may prevent circular flow patterns of the fluid above first stage aerator 400, which may impede the formation of floc. Secondary dam 1300 may be of any size, shape, material, or design.

[0035] The operation of an embodiment of the apparatus will now be described. With reference to Fig. 1, a mixture of flocculent and contaminated fluid may be introduced into innermost cylinder 110 through inlet 200 in tank 100. The mixture may be introduced at a fixed flow rate to mixer 300, which is in the bottom region of innermost cylinder 110. Mixing time may be fixed by the axial flow rate of the mixture through the mixing zone.

[0036] The mixture may proceed upward through innermost cylinder 110, reaching rotary aerator 400. First stage aerator 400 may introduce micro-bubble aeration to the mixture. This aeration may increase the flotation of the floc being produced and also serve to dry the floc that is floating beneath skimmer 500.

[0037] The aerated floc may continue its vertical ascent toward rotary skimmer 500, which skives the floc at a level above the fluid. The fluid flow may proceed radially below the buoyant floc, over innermost cylinder 110, and into second stage aeration region 130. The fluid may continue downward through aeration region 130 against a counter-flow of aeration bubbles, released by second stage aerating means 600, which may be an aeration ring assembly, as shown in Fig. 3. During second stage aeration, air may be supplied to each diffuser assembly 620 by air distribution manifold 610. Air may enter each diffuser assembly 620 through diffuser body 621 and pass into diffuser plenum 622 below sintered diffuser disc 623. The compressed air then may pass through diffuser disc 623 creating micro-bubbles that enhance the vertical entrainment and flotation of the wet floc. In addition, air bubbles may also serve to dry the floc that is floating beneath skimmer 500.

[0038] After reaching the bottom of aeration region **130**, the fluid flow may reverse direction and proceed upward through fluid column plenum **810**. The direction of the fluid flow then may reverse again after passing over the top of fluid level column cylinder **800** and proceed downward until it is discharged as decontaminated fluid through outlet **1000** at the bottom of tank **100**.

[0039] Meanwhile, the skimmed floc may proceed over tank baffle **840**, across de-aeration baffle **700**, and into waste tank **140**. The floc may release air as it travels across the surface of baffle **700**. The floc may be accumulated in waste tank **140** as a higher density fluid, which may accumulate in tank **140** until it is released through outlet **1100**.

[0040] In another embodiment of the present invention, illustrated in Figure 4, a pump and flushing fluid system **1400** may be included in the operation of the apparatus for treating contaminated fluids **10**. Wet floc, which acts as a flushing fluid, may be pumped by system **1400** from the lower region of waste tank **140** and introduced to skimmer blades **500** through a rotating head **510**. Skimmer blades **500** may direct the flushing fluid and skimmed floc over tank baffle **840**, across de-aeration baffle **700**, and into waste tank **140**. Floc may be prevented from accumulating on skimmer blades **500**, tank baffle **840**, de-aeration baffle **700**, and surfaces of tank **100** by this flushing process. Air may be released from the floc as it passes across the extended surface area of de-aeration baffle **700** and down the sides of waste tank **140**. The floc may be accumulated as a relatively high-density fluid and released from waste tank **140** through outlet **1100**.

[0041] It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that variations and modifications of the present invention can be made without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. Thus, it is intended that the present invention cover all such modifications and variations of the invention, provided they come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for the treatment of a contaminated fluid, comprising:
an integral tank;
5 an inlet for introducing a mixture of a flocculent and a contaminated fluid into said tank;
a mixer, located in a bottom region of an innermost cylinder in said tank;
first stage aerating means, located within said innermost cylinder;
10 a rotary skimmer, located above the fluid level of said innermost cylinder and a second stage aeration cylinder surrounding said innermost cylinder;
second stage aerating means, located within said second stage aeration cylinder;
a de-aeration baffle, located on the same plane as said rotary skimmer
15 and extending around an outermost cylinder;
fluid level control means, located between said second stage aeration cylinder and said outermost cylinder, directing fluid flow from said second stage aeration cylinder out of said tank;
powering means for powering said mixer and said rotary skimmer;
20 a first outlet for permitting clear fluid to exit said tank; and
a second outlet for permitting waste effluent to exit said tank.

2. The apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said powering means further powers said first stage aerating means.

3. The apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising skimmer height adjustment means for controlling water content of floc.

4. The apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising:
30 a rotating head of said rotary skimmer;
a pump; and

transporting means for transporting fluid extracted by said pump from a lower region of said outermost cylinder to said rotating head for introduction into said tank as a flushing fluid.

5 5. The apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising a primary stationary dam located above the level of fluid in said innermost cylinder and below said rotary skimmer.

10 6. The apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising a secondary stationary dam located above the first stage aerating means within said innermost cylinder.

7. A wastewater separator unit, comprising:

an integral tank;

15 an inlet for introducing a mixture of flocculent polymer and wastewater into said tank;

a mixer, located in a bottom region of an innermost cylinder in said tank;

first stage aerating means, located within said innermost cylinder;

20 a rotary skimmer, located above the water level of said innermost cylinder and a second stage aeration cylinder surrounding said innermost cylinder;

second stage aerating means, located within said second stage aeration cylinder;

25 a de-aeration baffle, located on the same plane as said rotary skimmer and extending around an outermost cylinder;

fluid level control means, located between said second stage aeration cylinder and said outermost cylinder, directing water flow from said second stage aeration cylinder out of said tank;

powering means for powering said mixer and said rotary skimmer;

30 a first outlet for permitting clear water to exit said tank; and

a second outlet for permitting waste effluent to exit said tank.

8. The apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said powering means further powers said first stage aerating means.

9. The apparatus according to Claim 7, further comprising skimmer height
5 adjustment means for controlling water content of floc.

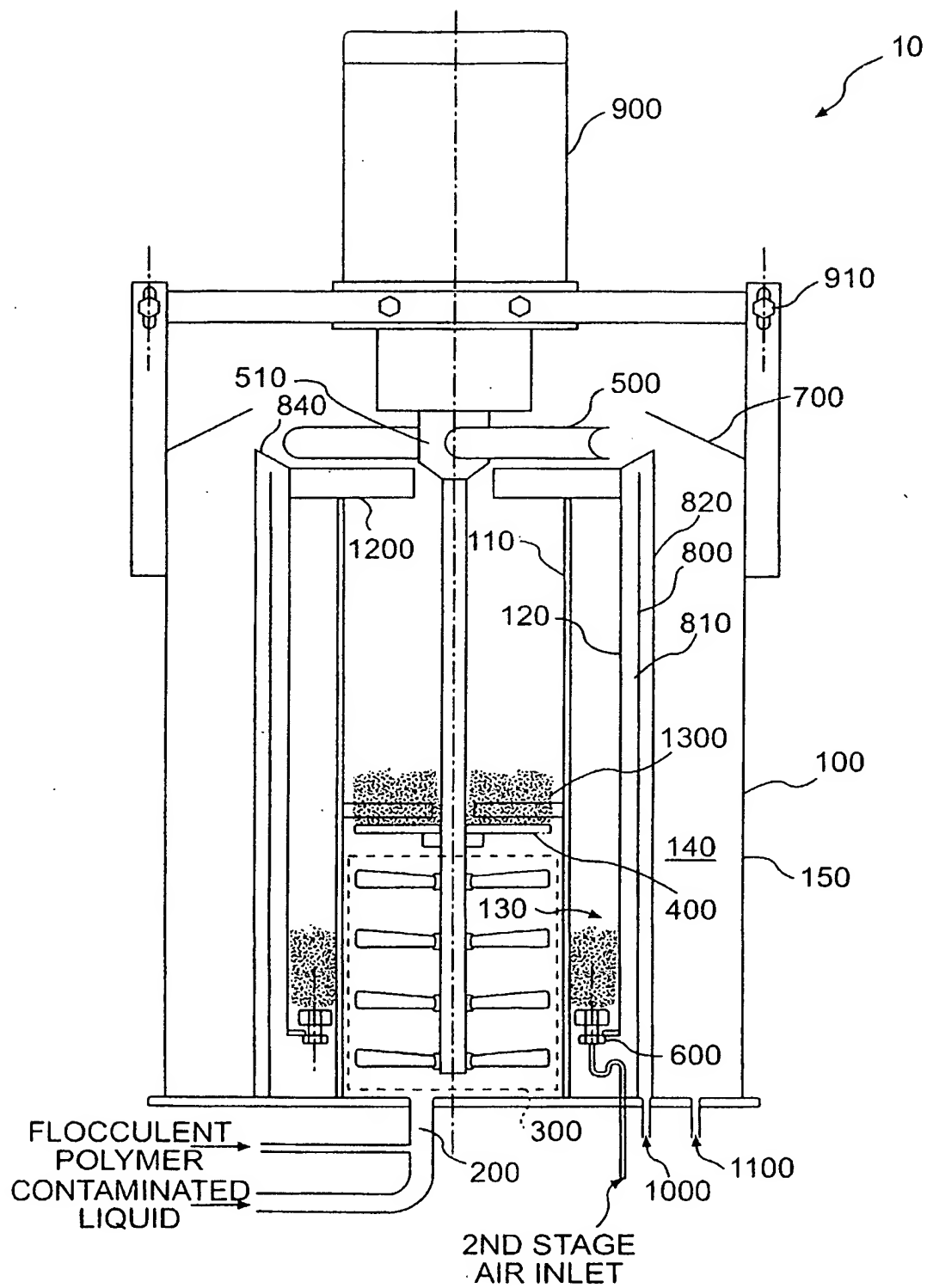
10. A method for treating a contaminated fluid, comprising the steps of:
introducing a mixture of a flocculent and the contaminated fluid into an
innermost cylinder of a tank having a mixer located therein;

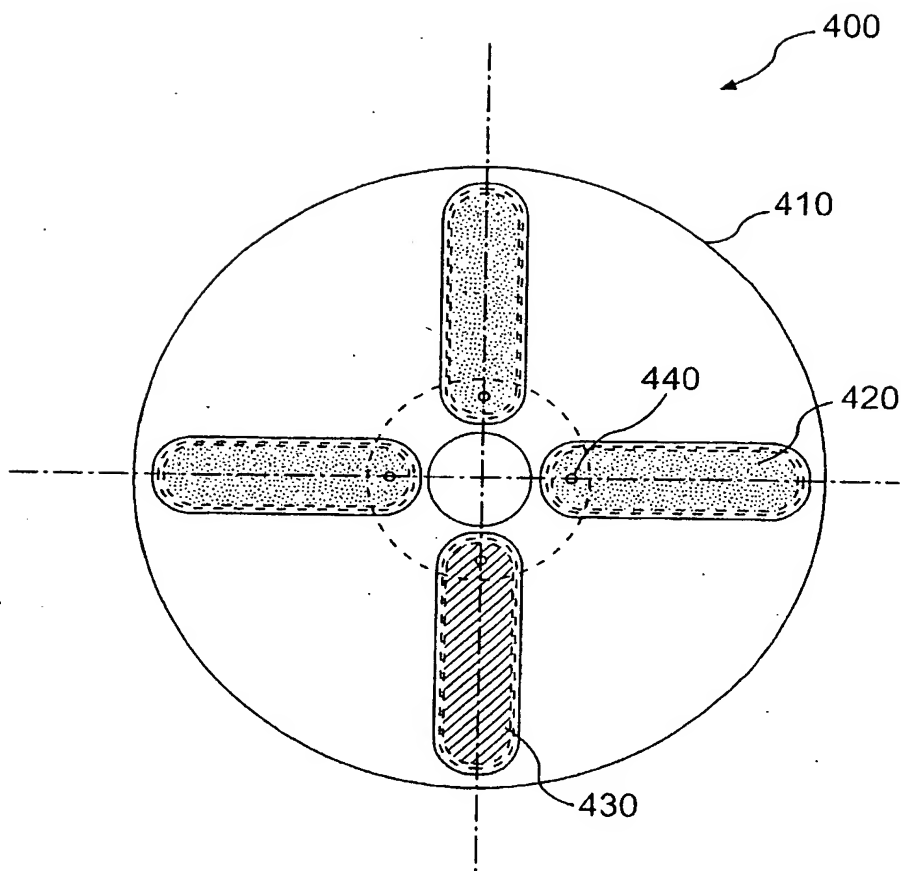
10 aerating the mixture as it proceeds upward through the innermost cylinder;
skimming the aerated floc formed by the flocculent and the contaminants;
aerating the mixture as it proceeds downward through a second cylinder
surrounding the innermost cylinder; and

15 directing the fluid flow from the second cylinder out of the tank as a
decontaminated fluid.

11. The method according to Claim 10, further comprising the steps of:
de-aerating the skimmed floc by directing it across the surface of a de-
aeration baffle into a waste tank; and

20 accumulating the floc in the waste tank as a higher density fluid until it is
released through an outlet in the tank.

**FIG. 1**

**FIG. 2**

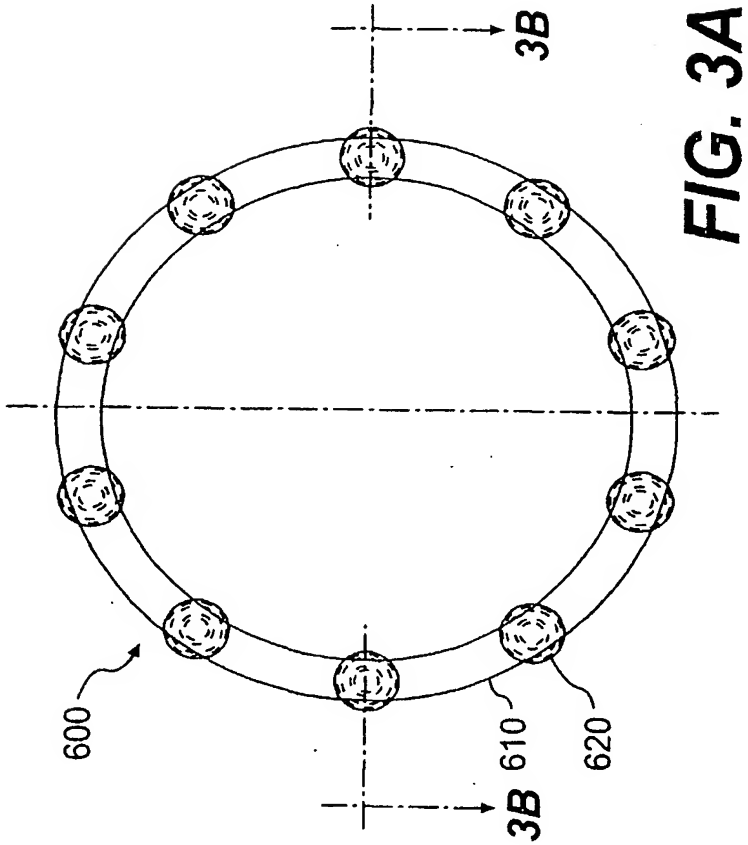


FIG. 3A

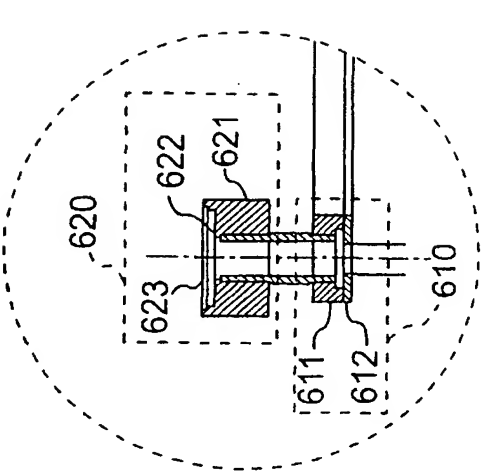


FIG. 3C

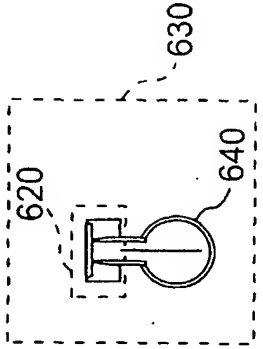


FIG. 3D

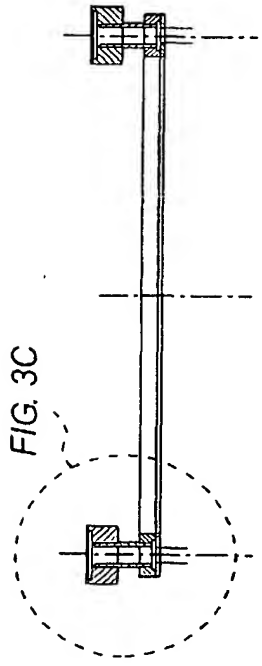
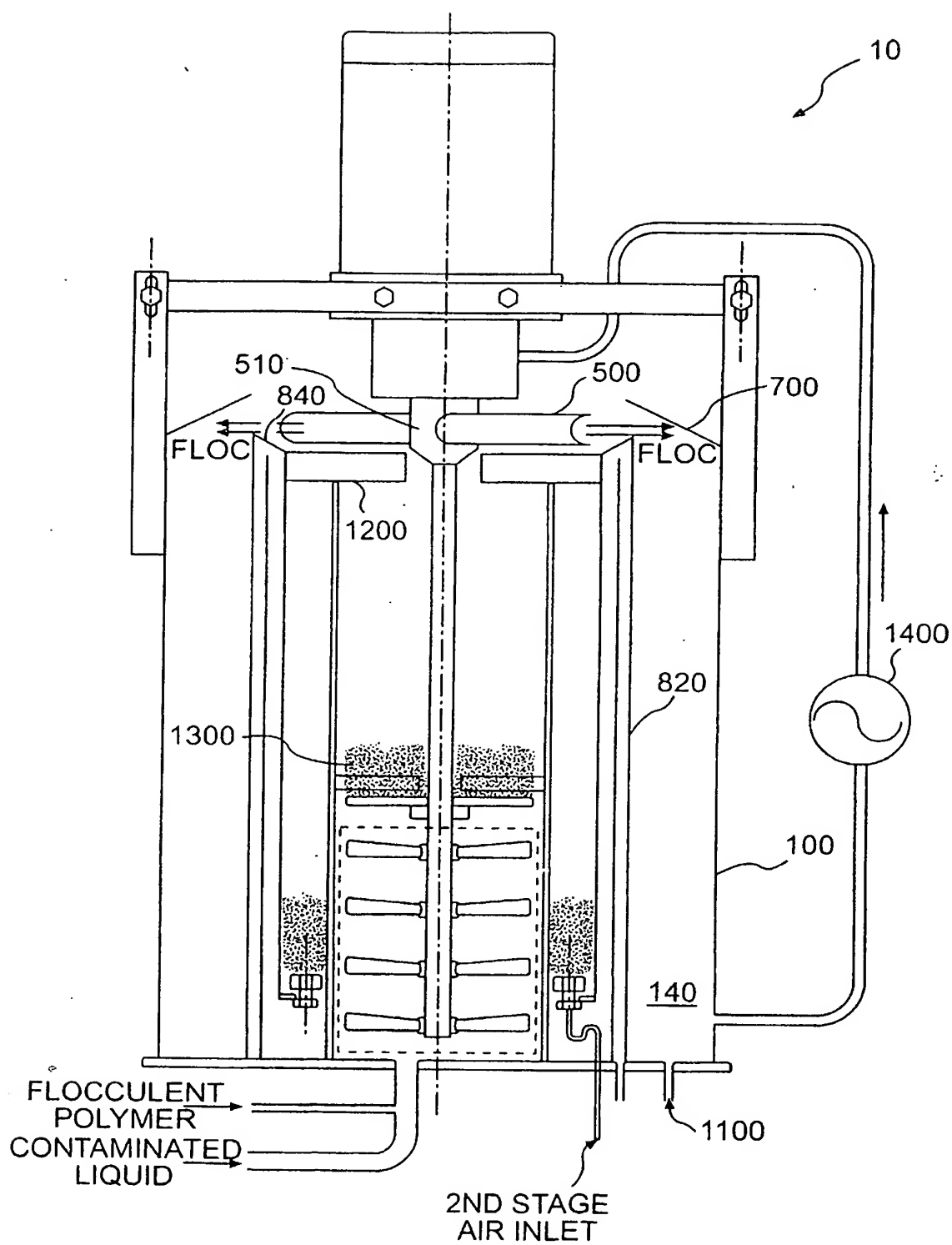


FIG. 3B

**FIG. 4**

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US03/04815

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : C02F 1/24

US CL : 210/221.2, 221.1, 703, 704, 219, 188

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 210/221.2, 221.1, 703, 704, 219, 188

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 2,274,658 (Booth) 13 October 1939 (13.10.1939)	1-11
A	US 4,251,371 (Bauer et al.) 17 February 1981 (17.2.1981)	1-11
A	US 4,170,797 (Sundberg) 16 October 1979 (16.10.1979)	1-11
A	US 4,659,458 (Chin et al.) 21 April 1987 (21.4.1987)	1-11



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

<p>* Special categories of cited documents:</p>		
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"&"	document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

13 May 2003 (13.05.2003)

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